

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

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R 090746Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3941

INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 3946

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OCON, MILI, PFOR, MY

SUBJECT: MALAYSIAN VIEWS ON U.S. MILITARY ROLE IN SOUTH EAST
ASIA

REF: MANILA 9384

1. THIS LOW, AND AS AMBASSADOR SULLIVAN NOTES, REMOTE HUMMOCK
MAY NOT BE THE BEST VANTAGE POINT FROM WHICH TO PERCEIVE
THE SEA CHANGES, CRESTING TIDES OF NEUTRALISM, OR DAWNS
OF A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF THE AMERICAN ROLE WHICH HE FEELS
MAY NOW BE TAKING PLACE IN THE ASEAN. AREA. THE ONLY EVIDENCE
I CAN OFFER IN SUPPORT OF HIS THESIS IS THAT THE NEW MALAYSIAN
PRIME MINISTER IS LESS DOCTRINAIRE IN HIS ADVOCACY OF THE ZONE
OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY THAN WAS HIS PREDECESSOR.
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IN TALKS PRIOR TO AND DURING THE VICE PRESIDENT'S VISIT

HERE IN MARCH, HUSSEIN SPOKE OF THE CONTINUED VALUE OF AN AMERICAN MILITARY PRESENCE, BUT THERE WAS NO MENTION OF WHERE IT SHOULD BE BASED (BY IMPLICATION AT SOME DISTANCE), OR HOW IT SHOULD BE SUPPORTED, OR WHO SHOULD BEAR THE POLITICAL COSTS OF ITS SUPPORT.

2. AT THE SAME TIME I SEE NO WANING IN THE MALAYSIAN ADHERENCE TO THE CONCEPT OF THE ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY. THE PRESS HERE WOULD HAVE US BELIEVE THAT THE RECENT ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING IN MANILA ENTHUSIASTICALLY ENDORSED IT. TO SAY, HOWEVER, THAT MALAYSIA IS THE "TRADITIONAL ADVOCATE OF U.S. WITHDRAWAL FROM THE REGION" MISSES THE GRADUALIST AND EVOLUTIONARY CHARACTER OF THE MALAYSIAN POSITION. THE OBJECTIVE IS THE EVENTUAL ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AREA FREE OF GREAT POWER RIVALRY. IT HAS BEEN PURSUED WITHOUT STRIDENCY OR URGENCY. THERE HAVE BEEN NO PUBLIC DEMANDS FOR WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. BASES IN THAILAND AND THE PHILIPPINES, AND IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS MALAYSIAN OFFICIALS ARE QUITE RELAXED ABOUT THEM.

3. TO RETURN TO AMBASSADOR SULLIVAN'S THESIS, I NOTE WITH INTEREST THAT BOTH HE AND AMBASSADOR HOLDRIDGE FEEL THAT RAJARATNAM'S SPEECH (NOT REPORTED IN K.L.) WAS A SHARP REBUKE TO THE THAIS FOR EXPELLING U.S. FORCES FROM BASES IN THAT COUNTRY. IF SO, WHY WAS THE REBUKE ADMINISTERED ONLY AFTER THE MILK WAS ALL FAIRLY SPILT? THERE WERE MANY OPPORTUNITIES FOR SINGAPORE'S VIEWS TO BE EXPRESSED QUIETLY DURING THE EXTENDED PERIOD IN WHICH THE AMERICAN WITHDRAWAL WAS BEING NEGOTIATED. FOR THE PAST YEAR, THE OTHER ASEAN LEADERS HAVE BEEN WRINGING THEIR HANDS ABOUT THE THAI WILLINGNESS TO FIGHT. DID ANY OF THEM SUGGEST TO THE THAIS THAT THEIR OWN AND BROADER AREA INTERESTS WOULD BE SERVED BY A CONTINUING AND STIFFENING AMERICAN PRESENCE? I HAVE SEEN NO SIGN OF IT.

4. MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE THAI BASES, BUIC, AND CLARK TO LESSER DEGREE, ARE ESSENTIAL TO OUR CAPACITY TO PROJECT OUR MILITARY POWER INTO THE WESTERN PACIFIC. IS THERE ANY INDICATION THAT MARCOS' ASEAN ALLIES (PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO ARE READING US LESSONS ABOUT WILL AND CONSTANCY OF PURPOSE) HAVE SUGGESTED TO HIM THAT THEY HAVE A STAKE IN CONFIDENTIAL

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THE OUTCOME OF THE ASEAN NEGOTIATIONS AND ARE URGING HIM TO SEEK A REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION WITH US SO THAT WE WILL HAVE A PLACE TO BE CONSTANT FROM? RAJA'S SPEECH MIGHT BE SO CONSTRUED, BUT IF SO, WHY THIS PUBLIC FORUM? IF THESE THOUGHTS WERE NOT ALSO EXPRESSED WITH EQUAL FORCE IN OFFICIAL, PRIVATE CHANNELS, MIGHT NOT MARCOS ASSUME THEY WERE INTENDED MORE FOR U.S. EARS THAN FOR HIS? AMBASSADOR SULLIVAN SHOULD BE ABLE TO ASSESS THIS AS THE NEGOTIATIONS PROCEED AT BAGUIO.

5. IF AMBASSADOR SULLIVAN IS MISREADING THE SIGNS WHICH HE PERCEIVED IN BANGKOK, THE REASON SEEMS TO ME QUITE EVIDENT. THE MILITARY BENEFITS TO THE HOST COUNTRY OF AMERICAN BASES OR AMERICAN TROOPS ON THE GROUND ARE NOW CONSIDERED TO BE FAR OUTWIEGHED BY THE POLITICAL COSTS. THESE COSTS INCLUDE CREDENTIALS IN THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT AND THE HOSTILITY OF A RESOLUTE AND POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS REGIONAL NEIGHBOR, VIETNAM, AS THE SECRETARY SAID IN DALLAS LAST MARCH, COMMENTING ON THE THAI BASE SITUATION: "OTHER COUNTRIES MUST HAVE THE CONVICTION THAT THE U.S. IS RELEVANT TO THEIR PROBLEMS. IF THAT DOES NOT EXIST, THEY WILL NOT RUN WHAT SEEMS TO THEM AN UNNECESSARY RISK."

UNDERHILL

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